



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
DARRELL V. MCGRAW, JR.  
CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION  
1-800-368-8808 or 304-558-8986

# Press Release

December 22, 2003

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Attorney General McGraw Announces Hotline To Combat Elderly Abuse**

Attorney General Darrell McGraw, working in collaboration with the U.S. attorney's office and the Senior Protection Task Force, released a statewide television public awareness effort Monday that focuses on abuse of the elderly.

"People need to recognize the signs of elderly abuse and report the crime," McGraw said. "We believe one of the best protections for the elderly is for everyone to keep in touch regularly, in person or by telephone, with their elderly loved ones."

The effort emphasizes that elderly abuse often is not only physical, but may come with the exploitation of financial resources, and that the abuse frequently occurs at the hands of family members. The National Elder Abuse Incidence Study of 1998 found that in almost 90 percent of elderly abuse cases, the perpetrator was a family member.

The toll-free number for assistance in West Virginia is (1-866) 241-5062, the Senior Protection Task Force hotline. The website is [www.wvlawswork.org](http://www.wvlawswork.org).

"By utilizing the unique enforcement tools of the federal system and building partnerships with advocacy groups and governmental agencies, like the West Virginia attorney general's office, we at the United States attorney's office are committed to protecting the elderly from fraud and abuse," said Thomas E. Johnston, U.S. attorney for the Northern District of West Virginia. "Encouraging seniors to report these crimes will help us fulfill this important duty to all of our seniors."

This effort comes in conjunction with plans by McGraw's office to introduce legislation in January to make abuse of people over 65 a felony, whether the abuse is physical or financial, Chief Deputy Attorney General Fran Hughes said.

Legislation also will be proposed to close loopholes in power-of-attorney documents by requiring three nonrelatives be witness to documents that give these sweeping financial powers to another.

The statewide outreach effort is particularly critical in West Virginia, which has the second-oldest population of any state in the nation, according to Ann Stottlemeyer, state commissioner of senior services. The state ranks first in terms of elderly median age. West Virginia is third in population aged 65 and older.

A fifth of West Virginians, 362,795, are 60 or older. Many require assistance, suffer from depression or Alzheimer's disease, and live in rural and isolated areas.

"Exploitation of the elderly is a national scourge, and is a serious problem that is growing in West Virginia," McGraw warned.

In a study conducted in 1991, 58 percent of the elderly victims of financial abuse were female and 65 percent were 66 or older, according to the National Association of Adult Protective Service Administrators in a report on vulnerable adults in 2003.

In West Virginia, there were 3,940 allegations of abuse and exploitation of elderly cared for in their homes in 2000. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that up to 2 million elderly in the United States are abused, exploited or mistreated.

Since much of this abuse is covert and subtle, the attorney general urges neighbors, friends and those who might notice financial transactions to be on the lookout for signs that regular patterns by an elderly relative, friend or neighbor have changed.

**Here are some things to be aware of:**

Be wary of a new and secretive interest in the elderly by a family member or friend.

If an outgoing elderly person suddenly goes into seclusion, check on him or her.

Watch for atypical spending patterns that include unusual bank activity and higher-than-average spending.

Be alert to unusual usage of credit, ATM or debit cards.

Check for a stranger with an interest in befriending an elderly person.

Make sure loans for the elderly are documented in writing.

Agree if someone assumes power-of-attorney that the person gives a regular accounting to family members. Build monitoring into documents.

Make unscheduled visits to check on caregivers' activities or hire a geriatric care manager to review financial transactions in your absence.

Meet people who process transactions made by your elderly relatives.

Document physical surroundings by taking pictures of the home assets

###